United Nations A/61/308

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 September 2006

Original: English

Sixty-first session
Item 56 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Eradication of poverty and other development issues: implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)

Observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 60/209, in which the Assembly welcomed the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and requested the Secretary-General to undertake a review of the observance of the International Day in order to identify lessons learned and ways to promote the mobilization of all stakeholders in the fight against poverty. The report starts with a brief overview of the link between the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and human rights. This is followed by a discussion of key elements of the relationship between poverty and human rights. The report then provides a review of the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty based on responses to a questionnaire sent to Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations. The review summarizes the major activities and events undertaken around the world to celebrate the International Day, and discusses the involvement of various stakeholders in those activities and events. The report goes on to examine the impact of the observance of the International Day and identifies key lessons learned. The report concludes with a set of recommendations on ways and means to improve the observance of the International Day and to promote the mobilization of all stakeholders in efforts to eradicate poverty.

* A/61/150 and Corr.1.

06-48755 (E) 280906

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–2	3
II.	The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and human rights	2–16	3
	A. Poverty as an issue of human rights	4–7	3
	B. Human rights as a tool to eradicate poverty	8–16	8
III.	Review of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty	17–56	10
	A. Awareness of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty	20–22	10
	B. Observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty	23–51	11
	C. Impact and lessons learned	52–56	16
IV.	Conclusions and recommendations	57–60	18

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 47/196, the General Assembly declared 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and invited all States to devote the International Day to presenting and promoting, as appropriate in the national context, concrete activities with regard to the eradication of poverty and destitution. The resolution also invited intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to assist States, at their request, in organizing national activities for the observance of the International Day. The Secretary-General was requested to take, within existing resources, the measures necessary to ensure the success of United Nations observance of the International Day.

2. Further, in its resolution 60/209, the General Assembly recognized the useful role the observance of the International Day continues to play in raising public awareness and mobilizing all stakeholders and requested the Secretary-General to undertake a review of the observance of the International Day in order to identify lessons learned and ways to promote the mobilization of all stakeholders in the fight against poverty. The present report responds to this request and takes stock of the activities and initiatives carried out at the national and international levels for the observance of the International Day. As at 14 August 2006, a total of 25 Member States[1] and nine United Nations entities[2] had responded to a questionnaire on the observance of the International Day.

II. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and human rights

3. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was inspired in large part by the fact that certain non-governmental organizations had, in many States, observed the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty on 17 October.[3] The World Day, which stresses the links between poverty and human rights, was first celebrated in 1987 by thousands of participants at the Liberties and Human Rights Plaza in Paris, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948. Over 100,000 people responded to the call of Joseph Wresinski to gather at the Trocadero in Paris on 17 October 1987 to honour the victims of extreme poverty, violence and hunger. The gathering proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected. The lines "Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty", echoing the spirit of the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty, are inscribed on the commemorative stone unveiled on that day. Replicas of the original commemorative stone at the Liberties and Human Rights Plaza in Paris are now found in several places around the world, including one on the North Lawn of United Nations Headquarters in New York.[4]

A. Poverty as an issue of human rights

4. The recognition that poverty is a violation of human rights or that promoting human rights could alleviate poverty was a long time in coming. However, a human rights approach to poverty reduction is now being recognized and implemented

internationally.[5] Such an approach links poverty reduction to questions of obligation, rather than welfare or charity, and compels policymakers to seek out and identify the most vulnerable people and implement appropriate strategies to help them escape poverty and destitution.

5. Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements and human dignity. A human rights approach is grounded in the International Bill of Human Rights[6] and the core human rights treaties that clearly define those rights. Among the rights guaranteed to all human beings under these treaties are the right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to just and favourable working conditions, the right to adequate food, housing and social security, the right to education, the right to vote and take part in the conduct of public affairs and the right to participate in cultural life.

6. The fact that poverty persists in many parts of the world points not only to an inequitable distribution of economic, social and political opportunities, but also to a violation of human rights. Often the condition of living in poverty also affects the ability of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and groups to defend their rights and responsibilities. The violation of human rights is thus both a cause and a consequence of poverty. People living in poverty are, by their condition, disempowered and excluded from society, and their capacity to secure their own rights is extremely limited by their situation. As a result, the eradication of poverty is not only a development goal, but also a central challenge for human rights, and the defence of all human rights is not only a concern of human rights activists and jurists, but also a central element of the poverty eradication process. The box below illustrates the key links between poverty and the violation of human rights.

Box 1
Links between poverty and human rights

Right to life and to physical integrity Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 3; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 6.	The lives and physical well-being of people living in extreme poverty are continuously threatened by lack of food, risk of disease, hazardous work and precarious living conditions. They experience violence of all types, including attacks, harassment, intimidation, severe discrimination and, in some cases, even death threats. Poor women are particularly vulnerable to domestic and other forms of gender-specific violence.

Right to recognition as a person before the law and to be registered Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 6; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, articles 16 and 24.	Due to lack of legal domicile and the high direct and indirect costs of registration, people living in poverty are often not recognized before the law and face significant obstacles in registering their children. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that in 2003, the births of around 48 million children (36 per cent of total births worldwide that year) were unregistered.[7] Not being registered, i.e., not having a legal identity, makes it very difficult to enrol in school, to obtain employment, to benefit from social services, to exercise political rights, to prove parentage, to marry, to prove nationality, to travel freely and outside of national borders, to take proceedings before a court or even to avoid being imprisoned. The recognition of this right is therefore a prerequisite for the realization of many other rights.
Right to justice Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 10 and 11; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, articles 14 and 15.	People living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights, but they often cannot avail themselves of the most effective tool to defend themselves against these abuses — court protection. They are hindered from access to justice by financial constraints, illiteracy, lack of education and information, lack of self-confidence, the complexity of procedures, mistrust and fear stemming from their experience of the justice system and the slow pace of justice. This is of particular concern, as people living in poverty are more likely than others to be discriminated against and their fundamental human rights are often violated with impunity.
Right to take part in political affairs Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 21.	Due to lack of information and political power, people living in poverty cannot participate meaningfully in political decision-making processes. Social discrimination and lack of housing, education and civil registration are additional obstacles to the exercise of political rights. Poor people are thus unable to influence policies to their benefit and their specific needs remain neglected. In addition, the very poor are also more exposed than others to unscrupulous manipulation of freedom of choice.

Right to participate in social and cultural life Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 22; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 15.	As a unifying force of society, culture is an important ingredient in social integration and serves as protection against social exclusion. However, the cultures of minorities and indigenous groups are frequently not respected, and people living in poverty often lack the basic capability to participate actively in the social, cultural and political life of their communities.
Right to decent work Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 23; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, articles 6, 7, 8 and 9.	Finding formal employment is often impossible for the poor due to social discrimination and lack of housing, education or training. They are therefore forced to find work in the informal economy. Such work tends to be low skilled, insecure, hazardous and too poorly paid to guarantee an adequate standard of living. Since their labour is often the only asset that people living in poverty own, securing the right to decent work is instrumental to the enjoyment of other rights such as food, health and housing.
Right to a decent standard of living Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25.	People living in poverty are often malnourished and do not have adequate clothing, shelter, access to water and sanitation, medical care and social services. This adversely affects their ability to claim other rights they are entitled to, such as the right to education, health and work, thereby reinforcing the vicious circle of poverty.
Right to adequate food Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 11.	Adequate food is needed for human survival and for a healthy life. Undernutrition handicaps people for life: hungry children cannot concentrate at school and hunger reduces workers' productivity. Poverty may lead to undernutrition and undernutrition is likely to deepen poverty.

Right to housing International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 11; Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 27.	Housing of the very poor — if they have any — tends to be built with low-quality materials, often lacks running water, sanitation facilities and electricity and is often located in unhealthy environments far away from basic services. It is frequently insecure as a result of legal or arbitrary evictions and the inability of the poor to pay even a minimal rent regularly. Additionally, poor housing has a major impact on the exercise of other rights, such as the rights to health and employment. Precariousness of housing can also affect educational attainment by hindering regular school attendance and hampering children's intellectual and physical development through lack of stability, lack of space, an unhealthy environment, overcrowding and noise.
Right to health Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 12.	Ill health contributes to poverty by reducing worker productivity, lowering educational achievements and limiting opportunities. At the same time, ill health is often a consequence of poverty. Health services for poor people are often inaccessible, inadequate or ill-equipped. Mortality rates are much higher, life expectancy is considerably reduced and pregnancy and childbirth are particularly risky for the poor. Although they are the ones most exposed to disease, the poorest population groups are the least often covered by vaccination campaigns.
Right to education Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 26; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, articles 13 and 14.	Education is one of the most effective ways of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and is crucial for the realization of other rights, such as the rights to work, health and political participation. However, it often remains inaccessible to those who live in poverty. When family income is insufficient, children are forced to join in the daily quest for family subsistence or work outside the home. This has a negative impact on their ability to learn and go to school. Poor children who are able to attend school are sometimes rejected or discriminated against at school owing to their social origins.

Sources: E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13; *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies*, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2002).

7. Poverty is more than just a lack of income; it is also the lack of health care, education, access to political participation, decent work and security. All these factors are interdependent and must be addressed simultaneously if efforts to reduce poverty are to be effective. Although in many cases rapid progress in poverty reduction has been achieved without full respect for all civil and political rights, all human rights are mutually reinforcing and must therefore be protected simultaneously in order to empower and support people in their fight against poverty. The Declaration on the Right to Development and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action[8] emphasize that it is necessary to respect economic, social and cultural rights on an equal footing with civil and political rights, and that the non-recognition of one type of rights can have consequences for other rights. For example, a person who is not registered at birth may be unable to have access to education and health services, even when these services are available free of charge. In other instances, the fulfilment of civil and political rights has proven to help achieve economic, social and cultural rights by empowering citizens to demand more equitable development.[9] The use of a multidimensional strategy that incorporates the defence of all human rights is therefore crucial to fighting poverty in all its many dimensions.

B. Human rights as a tool to eradicate poverty

8. The inclusion of human rights as an integral part of poverty eradication efforts offers several important advantages over the conventional development approach. There is a rich literature that provides a comprehensive discussion of the value of a human rights approach to poverty eradication. The following discussion merely serves to highlight some of the most important ways in which human rights considerations can benefit efforts to eradicate poverty.[10]

9. First, the norms and values enshrined in the human rights approach to poverty eradication have the potential to empower the poor. It is now widely recognized that effective poverty reduction is not possible without empowerment of the poor. The human rights approach to poverty reduction is essentially about such empowerment.

10. Second, the human rights approach to poverty eradication efforts obliges us to pay attention to the process of development as much as to its results. In general, the socio-economic development approach to poverty reduction tends to be focused on changes in the level of poverty — usually measured by the level of income — without considering the process to achieve the change. From the human rights perspective, the process is as important as the outcome, and the neglect of rights and non-fulfilment of minimum core obligations in the name of policy trade-offs and development is therefore seen as unjustifiable.

11. Third, a human rights approach to poverty eradication encourages us to monitor poverty reduction using a broader set of indicators, such as the nature of the progress towards poverty eradication and the instruments used to achieve it, and to consider whether such progress has been achieved through means compatible with human rights.

12. Fourth, a human rights approach to poverty eradication helps to establish who the claimants of rights are and who the duty-holders are, and makes duty-holders responsible and accountable for their actions. The latter group may include communities, Governments at all levels, the private sector, civil society and external

development partners, both bilateral and multilateral. For instance, States are not only encouraged to provide free elementary education for all; when they recognize this as a right, they become responsible for taking the necessary steps to fulfil it. In sum, invoking duties reinforces accountability and responsibility.

13. Finally, the implementation of all human rights is an important tool to eradicate poverty since it ensures that those rights are properly secured and defended. When human rights are guaranteed by law, legal instruments can be used to make sure they are implemented, and the rights of people living in extreme poverty can be restored. In that sense, providing people living in poverty with information about their rights and civil duties, guaranteeing free legal advice, conducting justice in due time and providing translation services for people from minority groups who do not speak the official languages are not only ways to ensure the implementation of such rights, but will also contribute to the eradication of poverty.

14. The enforcement of policies that ensure the respect of all human rights for those most deprived should be an important part of any poverty reduction strategy. Although not all human rights can be realized immediately, it is possible for States to work towards the progressive implementation of those rights, and Governments are accountable for the implementation of policies that help progress towards the full achievement of those rights.

15. Lack of resources is often cited as a constraint to poverty eradication and the progressive realization of human rights. In many parts of the world, additional resources are required, for example, to support free elementary education for all, to generalize access to basic health services or to create an efficient legal system. Economic growth is an important means to achieve these objectives. However, an increase in economic resources does not automatically lead to the realization of rights or to a reduction in poverty. Countries with similar income per capita can present significant differences in their social indicators. Progress towards the realization of all human rights is also a question of political will and not merely a question of the allocation of resources, although the progressive realization of human rights often requires higher and more equitable budgetary allocations for basic social services.

16. A participatory and transparent policymaking process is an important requirement for the implementation of a human rights approach to poverty eradication. Often, people living in poverty do not have information about decisions made by Governments that have profound effects on their lives. They may not be able to express their views and to influence public decisions. It is thus the responsibility of the State to provide information, determine how its policy proposals and decisions may impact the lives of poor people and respond adequately to those concerns. Including people living in poverty in these processes is not easy because it goes beyond mere consultation. It often involves first identifying and seeking out the poorest in society, particularly those without a voice.

III. Review of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

17. The present section provides a review of the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty by Member States, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society, taking into account the International Day's impact and lessons learned. In addition to responses to a questionnaire sent to Member States and United Nations entities, this review takes into account the report on the outcome of an international seminar organized by a non-governmental organization as a civil society initiative.[11] The international seminar, held in Montreal, Canada, from 22 to 26 May 2006, reviewed the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty partly on the basis of 175 responses to a questionnaire sent to non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

18. The present section first examines the extent to which Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholders are aware of the observance of the International Day, and how Member States and the United Nations system plan to raise general awareness about the International Day. The review also looks at the extent to which the International Day is observed by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society organizations, including the types of activities and events that have been organized, the persons or organizations that have coordinated these activities and the roles played by different social groups in the activities. In this regard, this section will report on some future plans to commemorate the International Day.

19. An important objective of the review is to gauge the impact that the observance of the Day has had on the efforts of Member States to eradicate poverty. Likewise, the section will also discuss how such observance has affected or influenced the work of different entities of the United Nations system and its impact on different social groups, especially among people living in poverty. The review will also address the possible lessons learned from the observance of the International Day, including further action and new activities designed to increase the impact of the International Day, drawing upon the experience of Member States, the United Nations system and civil society.

A. Awareness of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

20. An overwhelming majority of people working in the area of poverty eradication within their Governments reported that they knew about the existence of the International Day. Governments reported that they came to learn about the International Day through a variety of ways, including United Nations publications (such as the United Nations calendar), communications from the United Nations (such as information and correspondence received from the Secretary-General), through the country offices of different United Nations agencies and programmes and through media campaigns and the news media. For example, Tunisia reported that it had learned about the International Day during the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty in 1996. On the other hand, when Governments were asked whether they believed the public was generally aware of the International Day, about one third of the responses were negative.

21. Not unexpectedly, all entities of the United Nations system that responded to the questionnaire knew about the existence of the International Day. This reflects the fact that in most entities of the United Nations system, the work programme often requires them to track and implement United Nations Days and resolutions, including promotion of the observance of the Day within their organizations and by their clients. When they were asked if their programme recipients were aware of the International Day, most United Nations entities replied in the affirmative.

22. Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations did not fare much better than Governments in terms of awareness of the International Day. Of the 175 respondents who responded to the questionnaire sent to non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, about 65 per cent said that they had some knowledge of the International Day commemorations in their respective countries. However, it must be noted that in those countries where civil society groups actively promote the International Day, the level of awareness among people living in poverty and the public in general is generally high.

B. Observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

23. Nearly two thirds of the 25 Member States that responded to the questionnaire reported that they had observed the International Day. In general, most of the International Day commemorations took place in the countries' capitals. Some countries have a traditional commemorative location with special significance for poverty eradication (in Ireland, for example, it is the Famine Memorial). Only in recent years have commemorations started to spread to the local level. Exceptions to this are Senegal, South Africa and Viet Nam, where commemorations have taken place in many different areas of the country from the beginning. Participants in the commemoration range from a couple of hundred to several thousand, depending on the country and type of activity organized.

24. In recent years, Governments have played an increasingly important role in organizing events or activities for the observance of the International Day, either on their own or in partnership with non-governmental organizations, the private sector or the United Nations system. For example, Cambodia, Jamaica and Tunisia organized the commemoration of the International Day in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Some Governments have extended financial support to civil society organizations for the organization of events on the International Day. This is the case in Trinidad and Tobago, Senegal, South Africa and Viet Nam, where financial support has been provided to partners from civil society to organize events for the observance of the International Day.

25. In Cambodia, China, Ireland, Jamaica, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Viet Nam, a government office has been assigned responsibility for the overall coordination of activities related to the commemoration of the International Day. These offices are located within the Ministries of Social Development or Social Affairs (in Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Viet Nam), Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (in Mauritius), Directorate of Planning (in Cambodia) or specific offices for poverty alleviation and development (in China, Ireland and Jamaica). In the case of Algeria, a good partnership has been established between the Ministry of Labour and

National Solidarity, which initiates and develops initiatives to commemorate the International Day, and other social groups that conduct such activities.

26. Although the International Day was proclaimed in 1992, the earliest reported observance was China in 1994. The most recent country to observe the International Day is Malawi, which marked the event for the first time in 2005. In most countries, Governments stated that the decision to commemorate the International Day was taken at their own initiative.

27. Among the elements of the United Nations system that were surveyed, only two had never observed the International Day, while the others had organized some type of activity to mark the date in the previous few years. Most of the international organizations organized events in collaboration with other partners (generally civil society organizations), rather than on their own. All of these organizations have assigned the coordination of activities for the International Day to a specific department, usually the social policy and development office. Among the earliest entities of the United Nations system to start observing the International Day were the Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which organized their first events to mark the International Day in 1993.

28. Moreover, given the fact that the International Day started as a civil society initiative, civil society groups in many countries have been the ones who have initiated the observance of the International Day and have often been instrumental in persuading their Governments to become involved in the commemorations. This has been the case, for example, in France, Ireland, the Philippines and Peru.

29. It is useful to note that a theme is chosen each year for the observance of the International Day. The theme, an issue of special concern to the eradication of poverty, is the result of a process of consultation, initiated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, among a number of entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. In addition to the website maintained by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which provides information on the International Day, including events and activities planned by the United Nations system and civil society, the ATD Fourth World hosts a website that provides information on events and activities that take place around the world each year on 17 October.[12] Each year, the Secretary-General delivers a message on 17 October to mark the International Day.

1. Activities

30. Many of the countries that responded to the questionnaire provided a detailed account of the activities they organize to commemorate the International Day. To a very large extent, the events are related to awareness-raising and education on the meaning and the need to eradicate poverty.

31. One important form of activity is awareness-raising, often directed to the general public. These activities include the distribution of posters, tool kits, media presentations and press releases on the International Day about the importance of poverty eradication. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, there has been the broadcast of a documentary on successful community-driven initiatives for poverty eradication, the publication of a magazine on poverty eradication and a media campaign on the same issue. In Algeria, the Government organized information days on poverty eradication, during which panel discussions and radio and television

programmes were held on issues related to poverty eradication. In Austria, authorities have issued press releases and launched annual information campaigns. In Cambodia, the Government has published folders and posters and issued a press release.

32. In many countries, the media has been involved in the commemoration of the International Day. In Cambodia and Ireland, for example, International Day events are broadcast over radio and television. In Jamaica and Senegal, there were media campaigns involving newspapers, radio and television. In Tunisia, the media was used to provide information on programmes and measures to reduce poverty.

33. It is also common to find events that promote public discussion of poverty issues. Senegal, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Ireland reported organizing and sponsoring specialized discussions, such as forums or sessions on poverty and poverty reduction. Senegal organized several of these forums on its local private radio stations. In Ireland, a round table was held to discuss how the media reports on poverty issues, and an event was organized where a talk was given by an anti-poverty activist.

34. Additionally, in China, Germany, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, many awareness-raising activities are targeted at specific groups, such as the educational and vocational sectors, social and humanitarian associations, the private sector, youth, policymakers and people whose activities have a significant impact in poverty eradication. For these groups, the types of activities organized usually consist of seminars, conferences and film screenings.

35. Some activities have been designed to draw the attention of citizens to the importance of poverty eradication and to mobilize people in the fight against poverty. In China, these activities have included the organization of charitable and fund-raising events and donations, and in Bulgaria, China and Mauritius, events include the presentation of annual awards to groups that have conducted important activities for poverty alleviation.

36. Other activities organized to commemorate the International Day have as their main objective the creation of partnerships and understanding between different social groups. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, workshops have been organized for public sector officers and leaders of community-based organizations with the objective of enhancing community partnership. In addition, to promote interaction between government officials, non-governmental organizations and citizens, the Government has organized an exhibition featuring displays by different public sector agencies and non-governmental organizations working in poverty eradication activities. In Mauritius, activities such as the cleaning of villages, the painting of community centres and sporting activities for children have been organized to strengthen ties within communities and to promote the participation of all community members.

37. The International Day has also been traditionally linked to community artistic and cultural expressions as a means of expressing the need for community involvement to eradicate poverty. In this regard, the activities of the International Day often include art exhibitions (as in Jamaica) or cultural and artistic events, like theatre, music, art and drama, singing and poetry (as in Ireland and Senegal). As a way to express community involvement and solidarity with people living in poverty, food parcels have been distributed on the International Day in South Africa.

38. The International Day is often used as an opportunity for government and community leaders to reach out to citizens. The presentation of statements by community and State leaders to express a country's commitment and efforts to eradicate poverty is a common activity in several countries that commemorate the International Day, such as China, Jamaica and South Africa. Many Governments present their poverty eradication initiatives and programmes during the International Day, as is the case in Bolivia, Cambodia, Senegal and Trinidad and Tobago.

39. The United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies have made raising awareness about the importance of poverty eradication a major objective of their work and pursue this objective through their own activities throughout the year. These activities are generally similar to the ones organized by Governments and include forums and workshops on issues related to poverty; awareness-raising campaigns to promote the International Day and its events through their websites and other communication activities, such as issuing posters, press kits and press releases; and mounting art exhibitions on issues related to poverty.

40. At United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has organized annual observances since the International Day was first proclaimed by the General Assembly. These observances have been organized in collaboration with the Department for Public Information, the non-governmental organization subcommittee for poverty eradication and civil society. An important component of these past observances has been a ceremony held at the commemorative stone at United Nations Headquarters. This ceremony brings together representatives of Member States, United Nations staff, non-governmental organizations, civil society and people living in poverty. Apart from the ceremony, other special events, including panel discussions, exhibitions, press conferences and screening of documentaries on poverty, have been organized over the years. In 2005, the Secretary-General met with a delegation of people living in poverty.

2. Participation of civil society in events and activities

41. Non-governmental organizations and civil society have always played prominent roles, both as organizers and participants in International Day activities. In Lebanon, for example, non-governmental organizations have led marches against poverty; in Algeria and Mauritius, they organized exhibitions providing information on actions of national solidarity and various programmes and activities for poverty eradication. As part of the activities of the International Day, many countries provide financing to non-governmental organizations that work in the field of poverty eradication. In Algeria, the Government financed non-governmental organizations to organize a seminar on food security; in Senegal, the Government provided financing to micro-projects for poverty eradication.

42. Central to the spirit of the International Day is the participation of people living in poverty. More than anything else, the International Day represents — to people living in poverty — one day each year when their voices can be heard and they are given the opportunity to speak for themselves or on behalf of their communities about the adversities, obstacles and hardships they face every single day and the courage and resourcefulness it takes to deal with their extreme poverty. These testimonies are one of the most important activities of the many International Day observances that take place around the world each year and serve to inform the broader community about what it means to live in poverty. In Ireland, for example,

the International Day is organized around those testimonies, and in South Africa and Viet Nam, there are specific activities that directly involve the participation of people living in poverty. In Peru, the observance of the International Day was initiated by people living in poverty who organized a march through one of the country's main towns, Cuzco. This march not only helped them to feel empowered, but eventually helped people living in poverty to be recognized as a group and helped to open channels of communication between them and the local authorities and other members of the community.

3. Future plans

43. The majority of Member States that replied to the questionnaire are planning to observe the International Day. Those Member States that do not plan to observe the International Day reported that they already have other activities related to poverty eradication in place. In most cases, Member States that are planning to commemorate the International Day in the future intend to expand their current activities and to introduce new ones.

44. It is encouraging to note that 24 of the 25 Member States that responded to the questionnaire indicated that, in addition to raising public awareness of the International Day, they have also developed proposals to raise awareness among their citizens about the importance of poverty eradication.

45. The activities being planned by Member States for future observances of the International Day include the following.

(a) Raising awareness and promoting the activities of the International Day

46. Most Member States reported that they have elaborated plans and proposals to increase awareness about the International Day and poverty eradication among their citizens. For many of these countries, the awareness-raising is to be done through increased coverage of the International Day and activities by the media, having personalities or public officials present at the commemoration and launching information campaigns. In Armenia, Germany and Tunisia, for example, there are plans to disseminate information about the International Day through press releases and Internet announcements. In Cyprus, the Government has plans to publish information about the International Day in different periodicals, while in Trinidad and Tobago, there are plans to launch a sensitization and public awareness campaign on the importance of poverty eradication. In Lebanon, arrangements have been made to produce a movie and documentaries for television on the importance of poverty eradication.

47. In other Member States, there are plans to increase awareness about the International Day by launching anti-poverty programmes that are linked to the commemoration of the International Day, or by holding seminars, forums and workshops on the importance of poverty eradication on the International Day. For example, Cambodia will launch its Human Development Report and Poverty Profile on the International Day and Ireland plans to organize a conference entitled "Having your say", in which about 150 representatives of local development projects will participate.

48. Many countries reported that they intended to raise public awareness of the International Day and that they would focus on undertaking the same types of activities they had organized for past observances.

(b) Ensuring increased participation of all stakeholders

49. There are plans by Member States to mobilize all sectors of society to participate in the International Day. China, for example, has plans to increase its cooperation with non-governmental organizations to organize activities for the International Day; Turkey is planning to commemorate the International Day in collaboration with UNDP; Algeria is increasing its support to the poverty reduction activities of social organizations; and Mauritius is trying to involve the youth and children in the activities of the International Day by organizing an essay competition.

(c) Enhancing the organization and observance of the International Day

50. These include plans to increasingly observe the International Day at the local level (in Cambodia); to set up a permanent organization to coordinate the International Day (in Mauritius); and to include dissemination of local success stories in poverty reduction efforts among the activities of the International Day (in Senegal). In Luxembourg and Mauritius, plans have been made to provide financial support to several non-governmental organizations for the organization of activities to commemorate the International Day.

51. All of the entities of the United Nations system that responded to the survey are planning to commemorate the International Day in the coming years. For example, there are plans by the Economic Commission for Africa to organize a workshop with United Nations country missions, the African Union and civil society; by the World Bank to present findings from the global "Moving out of poverty" study; by the International Fund for Agricultural Development to develop and implement a communication plan; and by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to undertake activities with UNDP under the UNDP-UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing an international children's art competition on the theme "We can end poverty". It is planned to have the winning entries issued as a set of United Nations stamps.[13]

C. Impact and lessons learned

52. An important objective of this review is to understand the impact of the observance of the International Day for different stakeholders and the lessons that can be learned from past observances of the International Day around the world.

53. On the part of non-governmental organizations and civil society, a major impact of the International Day has been its empowerment of poor people. The International Day provides an important opportunity for people living in poverty to be visible, to have voice and to provide their testimonies on one day of the year. People living in poverty are also empowered because the International Day gives them a sense of belonging in the community, through their participation and involvement in community development programmes.

54. Among Member States that have observed the International Day, there was broad agreement that the International Day has had an impact on their efforts to reduce poverty. Entities of the United Nations system reported that the observance of the International Day has had an impact on the work of their organizations to reduce poverty.

55. The reported key impacts of the International Day include the following:

(a) The International Day has been useful in helping people living in poverty become more aware of their rights. It has also been an occasion to raise awareness among poor people of the facilities and services that have been provided for them by the Government and how they can gain access to these;

(b) The International Day has raised the level of awareness among stakeholders and the public of what it means to live in poverty and of the special needs of people living in extreme poverty. Both Governments and United Nations organizations concurred that the observance of the International Day plays a crucial role in reminding citizens around the world of the existence of poverty and that the eradication of poverty requires a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders. Some Governments reported that the visible impact of the International Day on the public inspires their poverty eradication agencies to continue implementing their plans to increase civil society participation;

(c) The International Day has also given Member States and organizations of the United Nations system a useful forum to better inform the public about their efforts to eradicate poverty, including their poverty reduction strategies and programmes;

(d) The existence of a day dedicated to poverty eradication has helped to further mobilize and allocate national resources to people living in poverty. The International Day has encouraged some Governments to direct more resources to combat poverty;

(e) The International Day is also an important chance for all partners — public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and civil society — to mobilize and better coordinate their resources. The commemoration of the International Day has, in many cases, mobilized communities and organizations to develop policies and initiatives for the reduction of poverty. One country reported that after the commemoration of the International Day began, more non-governmental organizations became interested in initiating pro-poor programmes.

56. Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society highlighted a number of useful lessons learned from past observances of the International Day:

(a) There is a need to mobilize more communities and stakeholders to participate in the International Day events and activities;

(b) There may be a need to rethink the way the International Day is celebrated in order to focus on the realization of concrete activities by Governments and stakeholders. The cause of poverty eradication is one for the entire nation and it requires efficient coordination among all State-governed agencies, the private sector and civil society;

(c) The Government should place high priority on the observance of the International Day and there should be a specific office or department responsible for organizing events. Senior government officials should be encouraged to attend International Day events;

(d) The International Day observances have created opportunities for dialogue with poor people, which has enabled the Government to better target their activities and refine their strategies to fight poverty. Poor people perceive poverty differently and such dialogues can promote a shared understanding of poverty among implementers and recipients of poverty assistance;

(e) The empowerment of people living in poverty is a tangible impact of the International Day and their prominent participation in future observances of the International Day should be actively promoted.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

57. The origins of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty remind us that the eradication of poverty and the respect for human rights are intrinsically linked. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of the denial of human rights. The defence and implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as political and civil rights, is therefore an essential tool in the fight against poverty.

58. The International Day has been observed around the world, largely as a day to remember and honour the daily struggles of people living in poverty. It represents an opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, a chance for them to make their concerns heard and a moment to recognize that poor people are in the forefront in the fight against poverty. The participation of the poor themselves has been at the centre of the International Day celebrations since its very beginning.

59. The review has shown that the International Day can be an important tool to support national efforts to eradicate poverty, by promoting dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. Beyond raising awareness of the need to eradicate poverty or its human rights dimensions, the lessons learned from observance of the International Day point to the potential of the International Day to serve as an important rallying point for the global and national campaigns to realize the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the goal to eradicate poverty and hunger. This would require an approach to the observance of the International Day that is more inclusive than is currently the case.

60. **The General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations to promote and enhance the observance of the International Day:**

(a) **Encourage Member States, the United Nations system and all stakeholders to ensure that human rights are mainstreamed into development discussions as a key tool in the eradication of poverty and, in this regard, to enhance community participation and strengthen civil society as key instruments in promoting respect for human rights and the eradication of poverty;**

(b) Encourage Members States that do not currently observe the International Day to consider doing so and encourage all Member States to make the International Day a national day for action involving all stakeholders and citizens so that the observance of the International Day can be a rallying point for the national and global campaigns to eradicate poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;

(c) Encourage Member States to ensure that the participation of people living in poverty is at the centre of the observances of the International Day and that special efforts are made to ensure the inclusion of the most isolated groups in society;

(d) Encourage Member States to use the International Day as an important tool for all citizens and stakeholders to become aware of the need to join efforts to eradicate poverty and end social exclusion and to ensure that the International Day and its message are widely known by using a variety of means, including the media, the Internet and national campaigns, to disseminate information about the International Day and poverty eradication.

Notes

[1] Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Jamaica, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mauritius, Monaco, Portugal, Qatar, Senegal, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey and Viet Nam.

[2] Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Bank, World Food Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Economic Commission for Africa and United Nations Environment Programme.

[3] See General Assembly resolution 47/196.

[4] This stone has been replicated in many public places, including in Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, Germany, the Philippines, Portugal, Reunion Island, Switzerland and the United States of America.

[5] See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2000* (New York, 2000); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework* (Geneva, 2004); and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* (Geneva, 2002) for a fuller discussion of the human rights approach to poverty eradication.

[6] The International Bill of Rights consists of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[7] United Nations Children's Fund, *Excluded and Invisible: The State of the World's Children 2006* (New York, 2006), p. 36.

[8] See General Assembly resolution 41/128 and A/CONF.157/23.

[9] See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2000* (New York, 2000), p. 74.

[10] See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework* (Geneva, 2004) for a comprehensive introduction to the subject.

[11] The international seminar "Ending extreme poverty — a road to peace — making the most of October 17th" was organized by the non-governmental organization ATD Fourth World as a civil society initiative to support General Assembly resolution 47/196 on the review and implementation of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The report "Civil society review of October 17th, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty" was prepared by the ATD Fourth World, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur representing the Committee for Social Development and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. It represents the views of non-governmental organizations and civil society on the observance of the International Day.

[12] The websites are located at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/ and http://www.oct17.org.

[13] The details can be found at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/art.htm.